

February 23, 2022

Hello Co-Chairs Olsen, Walker and Vice-Chairs Hartley, Dathan, Nolan and other Distinguished Members:

H.B. 5037

My name is Mary-Ann Langton, and I live in West Hartford. Patty Ellis, who is my personal assistant, will be reading my testimony that I have written for today's hearing. Ms. Ellis lives in Windsor.

We are before you to discuss two critical issues. 1. **To increase funding for the five Independent Living Centers (ILCs).** These non-residential Centers were started in 1987 to empower people with **all** disabilities regardless of their ages to live independently in the community. People with disabilities would be more likely to move into nursing facilities if they have not acquired the skills from the ILCs, in order to live in the community. As you may know, the cost of providing support and services to people with disabilities in the community is more cost-effective rather than living in nursing facilities. Therefore, funding for the Independent Living Centers is essential.

2. **To increase pay rate for Direct Support Workers.** For this discussion, I will be using the term 'Direct Support Workers' to mean workers who assist people with disabilities with their daily living needs and within their community and state. As a woman with a disability, I have been hiring and managing my staff since the mid- '80's. I have been fortunate to find workers who have been able to meet my needs until a few years ago. Then I could not find ANY staff who would be willing to do such important work of supporting me with my needs and helping me with various volunteer opportunities. I finally found someone after looking for **seven months!** Hiring workers have always been challenging but it became much worse over the last few years. COVID just compounded the problem! 40% of the applicants would come for an interview, but presently the ratio is **only** 10%. Some people with disabilities have combined shifts together in order to make the job more attractable but then the employers will have 'no one' later on in the day for their needs.

As you can see, our state is facing a devastating workforce crisis of Direct Support Workers. The disability community has coined the phrase of, "**the house is on fire**"_because people with disabilities are fearful of not being able to live in the community without supportive Workers. Therefore, a pay increase for Direct Support Workers is desperately needed.

Thank you for your attention.

Mary-Ann Langton